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HAS MYSTICISM A MORAL VALUE?

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DURING the last few years, especially since the beginning of the war, there has been a reawakened interest in Mysticism. Perhaps it comes as the culmination of the anti-intellectualism which rose as a protest against the aridity of logical quibbling, and the barren wastes of the materialism and agnosticism of the previous age. Mysticism comes as a way of escape from the world—hence its appeal to the turbulent world of to-day—it springs from the longing to pierce the veil of the invisible. In this respect alone it is akin to Spiritualism, for whereas the motive of the latter is doubt seeking evidence, in Mysticism it is belief. Moreover, the mystic is in search solely for union with Reality, the Absolute Spirit, God, not for communications with those who have died.

"The mystical consciousness," says Evelyn Underhill, "has the power of lifting those who possess it to a plane of reality which no struggle, no cruelty can disturb, of conferring a certitude which no catastrophe can wreck."¹

I.

First let us see what Mysticism is. The definitions are many and varied. Pfleiderer tells us that "Mysticism is the immediate feeling of the unity of the self with God. . . . the endeavor to fix the immediateness of the life in God as such, as abstracted from all intervening helps and channels whatsoever."²

Seth says "The thought that is most intensely present with the mystic is that of a supreme, all-pervading and indwelling Power, in whom all things are one God ceases to be an object and becomes an experience."³

¹ Evelyn Underhill, *Practical Mysticism*, p. ix.

² Quoted by W. K. Fleming, *Mysticism in Christianity*, p. 3.

³ Quoted by W. R. Inge, *Christian Mysticism*, p. 339.

For Cousin it consists in "substituting direct inspiration for indirect, ecstasy for reason, rapture for philosophy."⁴ Vaughan, the author of "Hours with the Mystics," gives us the rather bitter statement that "Mysticism is that form of error which mistakes for a Divine manifestation the operation of a merely human faculty."⁵

Leaving aside Vaughan's cryptic remark, we see that the mystic claims to gain not by mediate knowledge, but by immediate intuition, a grasp on the central Reality of the universe; to get into touch with the Absolute Spirit, and finally to gain union with this Reality. This communication may be in the simple form of the "prayer of quiet" of which Saint Teresa speaks, and Julian of Norwich when she says that "prayer oneth the soul to God," or it may be union through ecstasies, and raptures in which the individual's identity is completely absorbed.

Perhaps one of the most satisfactory definitions is that of Miss Underhill: "Mysticism is the art of union with Reality. The mystic is a person who has attained that union in greater or less degree; or who aims at and believes in such attainments."⁶

The complete union, however, comes only after a long period of training for the mystic—"The Ascent of Mount Carmel," or "The Dark Night of the Soul," as Saint John of the Cross calls it,—a time during which he is abstracting his soul from the world, and making it ready for this union with the Divine.

The initial step is that technically known as "Purgation," in which the senses are brought under control; where "Brother Ass," as Saint Francis called the body, is subjugated. This may be a simple act of renunciation, as in the case of Brother Lawrence for whom the purification consisted "all in one hearty renunciation of everything which we are sensible does not lead us to God," or it may

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 349.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 347.

⁶ Evelyn Underhill, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

⁷ Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God*, p. 20.

be the horrifying tortures of Henry Suso, or the "Dark Night of the Soul" of Saint John of the Cross, for whom the way to union is a series of "blindings," first of the senses, then of the understanding. "The first night," he tells us, "wherein the soul is purified or detached, will be of the senses, subjecting them to the spirit. The other is that night or spiritual purgation wherein the soul is purified and detached in the spirit, and which subdues and disposes it for union with God . . . the first night, or purgation is bitter and terrible to sense. The second is not to be compared with it for it is much more awful to the spirit."⁸

The second stage, "Illumination" or "Contemplation," is characterized by "insight," and by a prevailing optimism in most instances. This is the state of which the Second Brother speaks in Jacopone da Todi's "Dialogue Between Two Brothers in Religion:"

"Brother, I find the Cross all garlanded
And with its blossoms do I wreath my head;
It wounds me not;—nay, I am comforted;
The Cross is all delight and joy to me."⁹

The individual is strengthened by his contact with the Divine, but the distinguishing mark of this period as contrasted with the last stage, is that in the former the individual still regards himself as other than that with which he craves union. Brother Lawrence, for example, in his "Practice of the Presence of God," always differentiates between the Presence which he feels and his individual self. So it is also with Julian of Norwich. This is the type of mysticism with which we are most familiar, and with which we associate the poetry and romantic glamor.

In the last stage, the "Unitive" period, the individual loses his identity and becomes one with his Goal.

"I am thinking of what the soul was then (in union) doing," says Saint Teresa. "Our Lord said to me: "It

⁸Saint John of the Cross, *The Dark Night of the Soul*, Bk. I, 8, 1 and 2.

⁹Jacopone da Todi, *Lauda*, LXXV, (trans. by Mrs. Theodore Beck).

undoes itself utterly, My daughter, in order that it may give itself more and more to Me: it is not itself that then lives, it is I. As it cannot comprehend what it understands not by understanding.”¹⁰

All sense of individual personality has gone—the individual has become completely absorbed. This state, strangely enough, seems to be accompanied with pain: the soul being unable to bear so much of the Divine. This is what Jacopone da Todi means in his “Dialogue of the Differences in the Contemplation of the Cross,” when the First Brother says:¹¹

“Ah thou art warmed, but I am in the Fire,
Thine the delight, and mine the flaming Pyre;
I cannot breathe within this furnace dire!
Thou has not entered there, It burns not thee.

“Brother, thou breathest the perfume of the Wine
But I have drunk It, and no strength of mine
Can bear the onslaught of that Must Divine
That ruthless, ceaseth not to torture me.”

So again Saint Teresa says: “Rapture leaves behind a certain strange detachment also, which we can never inflict of ourselves, nor remove when once it has come . . . even now I have that sweetness (of the earlier stage) occasionally; but it is the pain of which I speak that is the most frequent and the most common. . . . In this communication the desire grows, so also does the bitterness of that loneliness wherein the soul beholds itself, suffering a pain so sharp and piercing that, in the very loneliness in which it dwells, it may literally say of itself . . . ‘Vigilavi, et factus sum sicut passer solitarius in tecto.’ . . . The soul is tormented also because the pain has increased so much that it seeks solitude no longer, as it did before, nor companionship, unless it be that of those to whom it may make its complaint. . . . It seems also to be a safer state, because it is the way of the cross; and in-

¹⁰ *Life of Saint Teresa by Herself* (Ed. by Benedict Zimmerman, O. C. D.), Chap. XVIII, 18.

¹¹ Jacopone da Todi, *op. cit.*

volves, in my opinion, a joy of exceeding worth because the state of the body in it is only pain. It is the soul that suffers and exults alone in that joy and contentment which suffering supplies.”¹²

Mysticism is not limited to any one country or religion. India has always followed the mystic way. The Mohammedan world gives us the Sûfis; we find it in Pythagoras, in Plato, and in Plotinus we get the culmination of pagan mysticism. Moreover, the influence of the Neo-Platonists upon Christian Mysticism cannot be overestimated. Philo represents the combination of Jewish-Greek Mysticism, and from China we get Lao-Tze, with his doctrine of Tao which is higher than reason.

“The Reason that can be reasoned is not the eternal Reason,” he says. “The name that can be named is not the eternal Name. The Unnameable is of heaven and earth the beginning.”¹³

But for each race and each religion, Mysticism takes a slightly different form, although the essentials are the same. The Mysticism of the Buddhist is pessimistic: he becomes will-less that he may be absorbed into Nothingness; the aim of the Christian mystic, however, is to destroy his own will in order to be one with the Divine Will. The mystics of Spain and Italy are far more emotional, more intense, than those of England.

It is, however, the Mysticism of Christianity which chiefly concerns us, and the point is whether Christian Mysticism has a value for the world of to-day.

II.

Professor Hocking has said in *The Meaning of God in Human Experience* that religion is “fertile rather than useful.”¹⁴ Accordingly, it might seem that we were adopting an anomalous attitude toward Mysticism, when we examine its salient features in order to determine its value.

¹² St. Teresa, *op. cit.*, Chap. XX, 10-19.

¹³ *The Canon of Reason and Virtue* (Trans. by Dr. Paul Carus), p. 73.

¹⁴ W. E. Hocking, *The Meaning of God in Human Experience*, Chap. II.

We are constantly told that the world of to-day is overestimating utilitarianism. However, the trouble is not so much that we of to-day overemphasize utility as that, for some, the scale of value has descended to the overestimation of that which is *materially* useful or valuable; we judge things in respect to the money or success which they bring in their train. But that is restricting value to a very narrow sense. And fertility is a form of utility. The only distinction in regard to utility is one of standards—of higher and lower values; of the difference between “long-run and short-run practicality.”

Bosanquet would have us believe, however, that religion is something entirely beyond the narrow confines of ethics; something *other than* morality.¹⁵ Here we are reminded of the mystic who said that he had “left the virtues behind.” Hence, just as the artist sometimes claims that morality has no right to judge art, so the mystic who claims to be an expert in religious experience, may say that morality has no right to judge Mysticism. Nevertheless, whether one agrees with Bosanquet that religion is apart from morality, or feels religion to be morality at its highest, the moralist, as Professor Perry has said, “is charged with defining and applying the principles which determine the good of interests *on the whole*; and while his conclusions can never replace those of the expert within a special field, they will always possess authority to overrule them.”¹⁶ The moralist has a right to judge any interest on its moral grounds; he is justified in trying to ascertain what, if anything, the mystics have to offer us which is of value, provided only that we mean value in the broad sense.

Of course Mysticism has changed from that of the middle ages; to-day the mystic does not follow the gruesome example of Suso, of abstaining from bathing for sixteen years, or of plunging his hands into burning lime, like Saint Rose of Lima. If an individual were to behave in such a manner to-day, he would probably be taken with all speed

¹⁵ Cf. Bernard Bosanquet, *Some Suggestions in Ethics*.

¹⁶ R. B. Perry, *The Moral Economy*, p. 176 (Italics mine).

to a Psychopathic Hospital for observation. The modern mystic feels that the world can supply him with evil, without his inventing exquisite tortures. Moreover, standards of value have so completely changed, that actions which in the twelfth or thirteenth century led a man to be revered as a saint would make him to be pitied as insane or deranged, in the twentieth. We of the present are appalled at the attitude of even such a charming saint as Francis of Assisi toward the "little pearls of sanctity."

"The East wind has replaced the discipline," says Francis Thompson, "dyspepsia, the hair-shirt. Either may inflict a more sensitive agony than a lusty anchorite suffered from lashing himself to blood."¹⁷

Even Henry Suso awoke to the fact that the tortures which the world and one's fellow-men can inflict upon anyone who, like himself, is sensitive, are far more painful than even his most ghastly self-inflicted physical agonies. It is true that the ascetic mystic is more logical, however, for if, as the mystics claim, evil makes for the perfection of the individual, we should court all the evil possible, not omitting the self-inflicted variety. However that may be, asceticism is chiefly a product of the middle ages, and now exists only in rare instances, as in the "Penitentes" of Mexico. Leaving it aside, therefore, we nevertheless find certain facts to be true of Mysticism in general.

First of all, the chief aim of the mystic is union with Reality. And because of the fact that it is his own soul which is to be united, the mystic falls into what might be termed a *moral* "ego-centric predicament." He is turned in upon himself; his whole state is subjective. His thoughts, to be sure, are occupied with God, but with God in relation to himself. With God in relation to the world in general, he has little or nothing to say.

"An anchoress ought not to have anything that draweth her heart outward," says the "Ancren Riwle,"¹⁸ and Saint John of the Cross, assures us that "He who is detached

¹⁷ Francis Thompson, *Health and Holiness*, pp. 21-23.

¹⁸ *The Ancren Riwle*, p. 49.

from creatures is not molested during prayer or otherwise, and so, without losing his time he gains easily great spiritual treasures.”¹⁹

Perhaps there is a lesson here for us of to-day. We are overstrenuous; we stress the social rather than the individual side of religion. As Father Tyrell has said, we want to go about doing good, but we like that kind of doing good which requires a great deal of going about. The mystic, then, would have us turn away from the world and meditate in solitude; he would have us believe that religion is chiefly a relation of the individual to God, with the relation of man to man as secondary. Nevertheless, from this ego-centric attitude follow certain corollaries. First, there is the danger that mystical experiences may be merely a way of escape from the trials of the world. Miss Underhill says that these experiences administer “to the human spirit not—as some suppose—a soothing draught, but the most powerful of stimulants.”²⁰ However, we observe that the more the individuals indulge in extreme mystical experiences, the less stimulating power they receive. Miss Underhill, herself, distinguishes between the earlier and the later experiences of both Catherine of Siena and Catherine of Genoa.²¹

Then there is the further peril of treating other human beings not as ends, but as means to the end of one’s own salvation. “I began to live,” says Brother Lawrence, “as if there was none other but He and I in the world.” Consequently, we are told of his attitude toward the world: “He was so far from wondering at them (the miseries and sins he heard of daily) that on the contrary he was surprised that there were not more considering the malice sinners were capable of; that for his part he prayed for them, but knowing that God could remedy the mischiefs they did when He pleased, he gave himself no farther trouble.”²²

¹⁹ Saint John of the Cross, *The Ascent of Mt. Carmel*, Bk. III, ix, 4.

²⁰ Evelyn Underhill, *Practical Mysticism*, p. ix.

²¹ Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism*, p. 432.

²² Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God*, pp. 11 and 28.

To be sure, the mystics are often noted for their good works, as, for example, Saint Catherine of Genoa, but they seem to use the good works as a means to an end. In their awful encounters with lepers, it would seem not that they thought their disgusting actions greatly helped the lepers, but that these actions exhibited the proper humility on their part. So with Catherine's kissing of the "pestiferous woman." The sick, the poor, the sinners, were for them opportunities for acquiring virtue.

The Blessed Angela of Foligno exhibits this extreme self-centered attitude in a much more appalling light than the indifference of Brother Lawrence. "In that time," she tells us, "and by God's will there died my mother who was a great hindrance unto me in following the way of God: my husband died likewise, and in a short time there also died all my children. And because I had commenced to follow the aforesaid Way and had prayed God that he would rid me of them, I had great consolation on their deaths, albeit I did feel some grief."²³ Let us hope that the Blessed Angela did not carry out in this instance the doctrine that "Heaven helps those who help themselves"!

Another danger arising from his ego-centric attitude, is that of a feeling of superiority on the part of the mystic, because of the subjective and esoteric quality of his experience. Too often he is lifted up from those around him with the result that he comes back merely with a condescending manner towards his fellow-men. He assumes that irritating "air of wisdom" which is never a characteristic of the truly wise; he becomes egotistic about his own piety and, paradoxical as it may seem, about his own humility.

On her return to the monastery after her serious illness, Saint Teresa tells us naïvely, "I went to confession most frequently, spoke much about God, and in such a way as to edify everyone; and they all marvelled at the patience which our Lord gave me—for if it had not come from the hand of His Majesty, it seemed impossible to endure so

²³ *The Blessed Angela of Foligno*, Chap. IX, p. 5.

great an affliction with so great joy. It was a great thing for me to have had the grace of prayer which God had wrought in me; it made me understand what it is to love Him.”²⁴

Another corollary to this moral “ego-centric predicament” in which the mystic finds himself, is that his separation from his fellow-men may lead to morbidity. No one exhibits more, perhaps, this darkness and blankness of the wholly introspective life than Saint John of the Cross. “The Dark Night of the Soul,” and “The Ascent of Mount Carmel,” are filled with descriptions of the miseries through which the tortured soul has to pass. There is something intensely pitiful about these books, with the insight they give us into the mental anguish of the man himself.

“Nevertheless,” he says, “because of the excessive pain it (the soul) endures, and the great uncertainties of relief, it imagines now, as the prophet says, that its calamities will never come to an end. . . . Besides, the soul derives no consolation now in the advice that may be given it, or from its spiritual director, because of the loneliness and desolation of this dark night. . . . For as it is so filled with and overwhelmed by its sense of these evils whereby it discerns so clearly its own misery, it imagines that its spiritual director, not seeing that which itself sees and feels, speaks as he does without comprehending its state, and instead of being comforted, it is pained anew, for it considers that his counsel cannot relieve its misery. . . . Moreover, the soul can do so little in this state; like a prisoner in a gloomy dungeon, bound hand and foot, it cannot stir, neither can it see or feel any relief either from above or below until the spirit is softened, humbled, and purified.”²⁵

Secondly, the mystic lays his emphasis on the emotions rather than the intellect. Mystical experiences are beyond the power or comprehension of the understanding; the

²⁴ Saint Teresa, *op. cit.*, Chap. VI, 4.

²⁵ St. John of the Cross, *The Dark Night of the Soul*, Bk. II, vii, 3, 4, 5.

intellect is regarded by the mystic as simply an unruly member which must be subdued. Here again, the mystic confines the use of his intellect to the analysis and the recording of *his own* feelings, of which he is usually an acute observer.

Even the "philosophical" mystics disparage the intellect as a way to light, and content themselves with reverberating phrases, such as Plotinus' oft-quoted $\phi\gamma\eta\mu\delta\nu\pi\rho\delta\mu\delta\nu\delta$. Moreover, like all true mystics, they delight in using capital letters. Even the layman has a definite conception of what is meant by "reality" or "love," but "Reality," and "Love" for the very reason that they are supposed to mean more than the former, defy analysis, and look more impressive.

"Science is vain, and knowledge but a cheat:
He who by learning's skill
Would hold Thee at his will
His heart shall never taste Thy savour sweet—"

so sings Jacopone da Todi.²⁶

Modern philosophy, with its trend toward anti-intellectualism, has come to the defence of the mystic here, and has agreed that only by intuition can we arrive at that reality for which we seek. The mystic is more logical in that he claims his experience is incomprehensible to the understanding. He does not attempt, as does the anti-intellectualist, to set forth "Reality" by means of concepts, when concepts are supposed to misrepresent and distort it.

Of course it is well for us to be reminded that "beyond all we know there is a vast region that we do not know." This is what James has in mind when he attacks "vicious intellectualism." But the truly wise have always known this. Socrates tells us that he was wise because he knew that he knew nothing; Huxley, that he "sat down before facts like a little child."

It is so much easier to feel than it is to think, that the mystic is apt to allow pleasant-sounding phrases to warm the cockles of his heart, without enquiring whether these

²⁶ Jacopone da Todi *Lauda, LXXXI.*

phrases represent a reality or not. We are told of Brother Lawrence that "he spent the hours appointed for private prayer in thinking of God . . . rather by devout sentiments than by studied reasonings and elaborate meditations," and that he said "we ought to make a great difference between the acts of the understanding and those of the will; that the first were comparatively of little value, and the others all."²⁷

The mystic undoubtedly demonstrates to us the vast power of love, but sometimes he also demonstrates to what folly or real mawkishness love can descend, when it is uncontrolled by reason, and unaccompanied by a sense of humor, which very few mystics seem to possess.

"Suffering from a headache," we are told of Saint Gertrude, "she sought to relieve herself by holding certain odoriferous substances in her mouth, when the Lord appeared to her to lean over towards her lovingly, and to find comfort Himself in these odors. After having gently breathed them in, He arose, and said with a gratified air to the Saints, as if contented with what He had done: 'See the new present which my betrothed has given Me!'"²⁸

It is this uncontrolled emotionalism of Mysticism which is responsible for so much of the hysteria which often accompanies it. Mysticism has a particular appeal for those of a high-strung, emotional nature, and, for that reason, it leads to emotional excesses. The particular form of the emotion depends upon the temperament of the individual, or he may alternate from exalted to dejected moods: from ecstacy to "dryness," or absolute despair.

Of Brother John of Alvernia, one of the Franciscans, we are told: "The love of God kindled in him such sweetness of grace, that not being able to remain still to endure such sweetness, he would get up, and as one drunken in spirit, would run, now through the garden, now through the wood, now through the church, according as the flame and the ardour of the spirit drove him." Once, his heart was so

²⁷ Brother Lawrence, *op. cit.*, pp. 16 and 24.

²⁸ Quoted by William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, p. 345.

kindled with the fire of love that it lasted for three years, but after this came the opposite extreme: "whereby Brother John remained without the light and love of God, and altogether disconsolate and afflicted, and distressed. For the which cause, being in such anguish, he went through the wood running hither and thither, calling with cries and tears, and sighs on the beloved spouse of his soul who had hidden himself and gone away from him . . . but in no place and in no manner could he find this sweet Jesu again, nor taste again those sweet spiritual draughts of the love of Jesu Christ, as he had been wont. And this tribulation endured for many days."²⁹

This emotional despair is quite distinct, however, from the morbidity of introspection which we saw in Saint John of the Cross, who would have accused Brother John of Alvernia of "spiritual gluttony."

Acute physical evidence of hysteria, as in Saint Catherine of Genoa's inability to eat anything at times, save the sacrament, and the "burning sense" of the Divine Love, of which so many of the mystics speak, may accompany the emotional state. To hysteria, also, we might ascribe Saint Catherine of Siena's "engagement ring," or the jewels which Saint Teresa saw on the cross of her rosary after the vision in which the Lord touched it.

III.

In reviewing the facts of Mysticism, we are lead to certain conclusions as to its results.

First, although it is well for us to be reminded of the value of occasional solitude and contemplation, and of the personal as well as the social side of religion, Mysticism tends to be desocializing: it calls the individual away from the world, and focuses his thoughts upon himself. It makes him regard his fellow-men either as incidents, or as means to his own salvation. Whatever "love" he has for others in the world is purely impersonal. The mystic makes a complete contrast between the love of God and the love of one's fellow-men.

²⁹ *The Little Flowers of Saint Francis*, p. 148 and 149.

"We ought to love our friends, but without encroaching upon the love of God, which must be the chief," says Brother Lawrence.³⁰

It is because of this cleavage that Professor Hocking offers a suggestion in his "theory of alternation," similar to that of the *Theologia Germanica* as to the "two eyes of the soul." "God and the world I maintain," he says, "must be worked in with one another forever: forever they must be pursued in alternation. . . . With the idea of God one loves the world; and then with the idea of the world one loves God again, and the two loves, or ambitions are of one substance, though they involve alternations in the history of the will."³¹

But, as the *Theologia Germanica* quite rightly points out, such alternation is practically impossible. "If the soul shall see with the right eye into eternity, then the left eye must close itself and refrain from working, and be as though it were dead. For if the left eye be fulfilling its office toward outward things, that is, holding converse with time and the creatures, then must the right eye be hindered in its working; that is, in its contemplation. Therefore, whosoever will have the one must let the other go; for, 'no man can serve two masters.'"³²

Moreover, as the mystic nears his goal, alternation becomes more and more of a physical impossibility. He is "wholly rapt away," and returns not with renewed strength as at first, but with weakened powers.

But the necessity for alternation seems false and unnatural; love is something which does not have to alternate; which should not alternate if it is profound and sincere. A man does not have to alternate from his love for his wife to his love for his child. His love includes both, and the two affections are mutually inclusive. So the man who truly loves God does not therefore have to cease tem-

³⁰ Brother Lawrence, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

³¹ W. E. Hocking, *op. cit.*, pp. 407 and 424.

³² *Theologia Germanica*, p. 20.

porarily from loving his fellow-men, or vice versa, and to be beaten back and forth between these two loves or ambitions like a shuttlecock. They are, as Professor Hocking says, "of one substance," but for that very reason, there is no need of alternation, or of the detached, impersonal love toward other human-beings, because of one's love for God. The two should be mutually inclusive.

Another arbitrary distinction which the mystic makes is that between being and doing. "A third lesson in valuation the mystics bring home to us," says John Wright Buckham, "the superiority of *being* above *having* or *doing*."³³

Now whether one is a "Behaviorist," or not, it would seem certain that speech and action are the only keys which we have to mental states, and of these two, action is by far the more reliable. It is quite fair to make the distinction between being and saying, or doing and saying, but if a man is a saint, this will appear in his actions, and if his actions are saintly, the probability is that he is a saint. "By their fruits shall ye know them." Doing is simply the natural outlet of being, and a man's actions, especially at crucial moments, are the best index to his character. The stress of "being" as something quite apart from doing, leads once more to that overemphasizing of self to which the mystic is so prone.

Secondly, the self which is the result of the mystic way, is a narrow, exclusive one even if it escapes being "pathological." This is partly due to the unconscious egoism of the wholly subjective attitude of Mysticism; the complete breaking away from the world. Interests, affections, desires, all go to make up the self, and with each stifling of interest, the self narrows in its range. When you have succeeded in passing through the "Dark Night of the Soul," or building up the "Interior Castle," you may have got rid of all earthly desires, you may have curbed the unruly intellect, but what have you left? Something which is strangely akin to the blankness of Stoic *άναθλα*.

³³ John Wright Buckham, *Mysticism in Modern Life*, p. 186.

It is a state of emptiness which is anything but beneficial to the world in general, and which compresses rather than extends the individual's own powers.

Thirdly, Mysticism makes no place for progress. It has no interest in the sciences, or any learning, even when it does not openly disparage them. It is not at all melioristic in tone, since it regards the world as a sort of purgatory, and the only evils which the mystic proposes to eradicate are what he considers his sins. Here, as always, Mysticism is subjective.

"I do not pray that you may be delivered from your troubles," writes Brother Lawrence to the Reverend Mother, "but I pray God earnestly that He would give you strength and patience to bear them as long as He pleases. . . . They who trust in sickness as coming from the hand of God, as the effect of His mercy, and the means which He employs for their salvation, commonly find in it great sweetness and sensible consolation."³⁴

Thus Mysticism, when it is logical, adopts a purely "laissez-faire" attitude toward evil in the external world. There is no room in its scheme for the conquest of nature through mind; there is no vision of banishing evil from the world;—simply the salvation of the individual soul, and since tribulation is necessary for this salvation, why try to wipe it out, or to improve conditions?

Whatever value Mysticism has for the world comes in its second stage, the "illuminative" period, before the individual is wholly rapt away—when he still maintains his own personality, his poise, and when his experiences seem to strengthen not detract from his vitality. The rationalist may object to the methods and the theories of the mystic, but provided that the latter is not dogmatic about his experiences, if these experiences do renew his vitality, and if he can keep from establishing a false barrier between the love of God, and the love of his fellow-men, the rationalist must admit that Mysticism at this stage,

³⁴ Brother Lawrence, *op. cit.*, pp. 51 and 52.

may have a value for individuals of specific temperament. But it would seem that the value is wholly dependent upon the strength of the intellect and will of the individual to prevent his Mysticism from unbalancing him and of thereby rendering him valueless. The reason that Mysticism at this stage may have a value is the very fact that the individual's intellect and will have not yet become subdued entirely.

However, the fact that the more deeply a man follows the mystic way, the more useless he becomes, shows that the value of Mysticism is doubtful. In its last stage with its will-lessness and blankness, or its hysterical emotionalism, it would seem to be a loss rather than a gain.

"The faculties of the soul now retain only the power of occupying themselves wholly with God," says Saint Teresa, "not one of them ventures to stir, neither can we move one of them, without making great efforts to distract ourselves. The understanding is utterly powerless here; the soul longs to send forth words of praise, but it has no control over itself. . . . The flowers are already opening; they are beginning to send forth their fragrance."³⁵

"Well, what were its (the vision of the Sacred Heart) good fruits for Margaret Mary's life?" queries James in speaking of "La Bienheureuse Marguerite Marie," who has just been canonized, I believe. "Apparently little else but sufferings and prayers and absences of mind and swoons and ecstasies. She became increasingly useless about the convent. . . . Amiable and good, but so feeble of intellectual outlook that it would be too much to expect of us . . . to feel anything but an indulgent pity for the kind of saintship which she embodies."³⁶

Elsewhere, James has said that "a saint in ecstasy is as motionless, and irresponsible, and one-idea'd as a melancholiac."³⁷ In other words he is so completely absorbed in his own feelings, that everything else fades from his mind,

³⁵ St. Teresa, *op. cit.*, Chap. XVI, 4.

³⁶ William James, *op. cit.*, p. 344.

³⁷ *Talks to Teachers*, p. 220.

and when he spends the greater part of his time in this way, his value for the world has ceased.

But while Mysticism may have a value for certain individuals at its second stage, logically, if the mystic remains there, he is a failure as a mystic, in that he has not attained the "unitive" stage which is his goal.

Professor Buckham warns mystics to guard against "excesses"³⁸ but in so doing, he is admitting that Mysticism needs to be curbed, because the "unitive" stage which is the goal of Mysticism is a state of "excess."

Lastly, Mysticism gives us a God indifferent, as James says, "to everything but adulation, and full of partiality for his individual favorites,"³⁹ because of the "me and God" attitude of the individual who has forgotten that "whereas for other religions only God and a man are necessary, Christianity requires God and two men, because of its emphasis on the relation of man to man."

To-day, more than ever before, men and women need a faith which does not unbalance them, which does not destroy personality but develops it, and enlarges its scope, and which combined with reason, will equip them to go forth into the world of action.

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³⁸ John Wright Buckham, *Mysticism and Modern Life*, pp. 103-105.

³⁹ William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, p. 346.